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*The face and the voice of a child are assurance of
heaven and its promise for ever*

THE SPRINGTIDE OF LIFE



POEMS OF CHILDHOOD BY
ALGERNON CHARLES SWINBURNE
WITH A PREFACE BY EDMUND GOSSE



ILLUSTRATED BY ARTHUR RACKHAM

LONDON
WILLIAM HEINEMANN

London : William Heinemann, 1918



Preface

AS the close of his life approached, Swinburne frequently expressed his intention to extract from his various volumes those poems which were addressed to children, or were descriptive of child life, and to publish them in a separate collection. He died without having found occasion to carry out this plan, and he left no directions with regard to the way in which it ought to be done. But I have felt that there should be as little further delay as possible in carrying out his wish and design, and in preparing the present anthology I have been actuated by the sole thought of what would have commended itself to him.

I have taken no liberties with the text ; I have simply selected from the four volumes in which they mainly occur—namely, from *Poems and Ballads*, Second Series (1878), *Tristram of Lyonesse and Other Poems* (1882), *A Century of Roundels* (1883), and *Poems and Ballads*, Third Series (1889)—the pieces which are definitely concerned with infancy. I have omitted one or two in which there was a close repetition of subject or form of

address, and I have rearranged them all in some rough chronological order, beginning with the songs of birth and proceeding to those which celebrate the maturity of nine years. I supplement the whole with the impassioned cycle of poems called "A Dark Month."

One reason why Swinburne never brought out such a collection was his failure to find an artist who could interpret to his satisfaction the simplicity and freshness of his verses. We are fortunate in having secured, in Mr. Arthur Rackham, one whose delicate and romantic fancy is in sensitive harmony with Swinburne's, and who understands, no less than he did, how "Heaven lies about us in our infancy."

EDMUND GOSSE





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Herse

WHEN grace is given us ever to behold
A child some sweet months old,
Love, laying across our lips his finger, saith,
Smiling, with bated breath,
Hush ! for the holiest thing that lives is here,
And heaven's own heart how near !
How dare we, that may gaze not on the sun,
Gaze on this verier one ?
Heart, hold thy peace ; eyes, be cast down for
Lips, breathe not yet its name. [shame ;
In heaven they know what name to call it ; we,
How should we know ? For, see !
The adorable sweet living marvellous
Strange light that lightens us
Who gaze, desertless of such glorious grace,
Full in a babe's warm face !
All roses that the morning rears are nought,
All stars not worth a thought,
Set this one star against them, or suppose
As rival this one rose.
What price could pay with earth's whole weight
One least flushed roseleaf's fold [of gold
Of all this dimpling store of smiles that shine
From each warm curve and line,

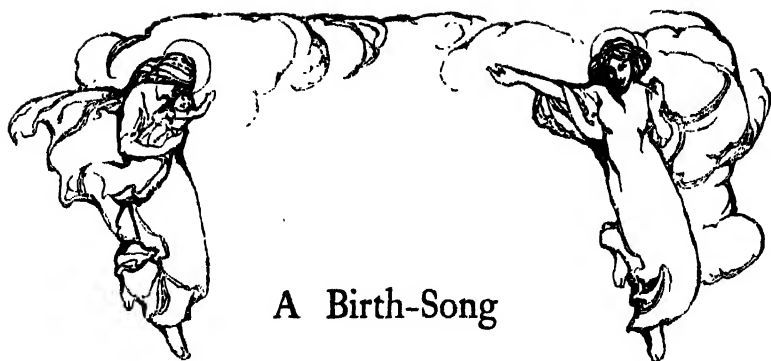
Each charm of flower-sweet flesh, to reillumine
 The dappled rose-red bloom
 Of all its dainty body, honey-sweet
 Clenched hands and curled-up feet,
 That on the roses of the dawn have trod
 As they came down from God,
 And keep the flush and colour that the sky
 Takes when the sun comes nigh,
 And keep the likeness of the smile their grace
 Evoked on God's own face
 When, seeing this work of his most heavenly mood,
 He saw that it was good ?
 For all its warm sweet body seems one smile,
 And mere men's love too vile
 To meet it, or with eyes that worship dims
 Read o'er the little limbs,
 Read all the book of all their beauties o'er,
 Rejoice, revere, adore,
 Bow down and worship each delight in turn,
 Laugh, wonder, yield, and yearn.
 But when our trembling kisses dare, yet dread,
 Even to draw nigh its head,
 And touch, and scarce with touch or breath surprise
 Its mild miraculous eyes
 Out of their viewless vision—O, what then,
 What may be said of men ?
 What speech may name a new-born child ? what word
 Earth ever spake or heard ?
 The best men's tongue that ever glory knew
 Called that a drop of dew
 Which from the breathing creature's kindly womb
 Came forth in blameless bloom.
 We have no word, as had those men most high,
 To call a baby by.
 Rose, ruby, lily, pearl of stormless seas—
 A better word than these,

Hush ' for the holiest thing that lives is here



A better sign it was than flower or gem
That love revealed to them :
They knew that whence comes light or quickening
Thence only this thing came, [flame,
And only might be likened of our love
To somewhat born above,
Not even to sweetest things dropped else on earth,
Only to dew's own birth.
Nor doubt we but their sense was heavenly true,
Babe, when we gaze on you,
A dewdrop out of heaven whose colours are
More bright than sun or star,
As now, ere watching love dare fear or hope,
Lips, hands, and eyelids ope,
And all your life is mixed with earthly leaven.
O child, what news from heaven ?





A Birth-Song

OUT of the dark sweet sleep
Where no dreams laugh or weep
 Borne through bright gates of birth
Into the dim sweet light
Where day still dreams of night
 While heaven takes form on earth.
White rose of spirit and flesh, red lily of love,
 What note of song have we
 Fit for the birds and thee,
Fair nestling couched beneath the mother-dove ?

Nay, in some more divine
Small speechless song of thine
 Some news too good for words,
Heart-hushed and smiling, we
Might hope to have of thee.
 The youngest of God's birds,
If thy sweet sense might mix itself with ours,
 If ours might understand
 The language of thy land,
Ere thine become the tongue of mortal hours :

Ere thy lips learn too soon
Their soft first human tune,
 Sweet, but less sweet than now,
And thy raised eyes to read
Glad and good things indeed,
 But none so sweet as thou :
Ere thought lift up their flower-soft lids to see
 What life and love on earth
 Bring thee for gifts at birth,
But none so good as thine who hast given us thee ;

Now, ere thy sense forget
The heaven that fills it yet,
 Now, sleeping or awake,
If thou couldst tell, or we
Ask and be heard of thee,
 For love's undying sake,
From thy dumb lips divine and bright mute speech
 Such news might touch our ear
 That then would burn to hear
Too high a message now for man's to reach.

Ere the gold hair of corn
Had withered wast thou born,
 To make the good time glad ;
The time that but last year
Fell colder than a tear
 On hearts and hopes turned sad,
High hopes and hearts requickening in thy dawn,
 Even theirs whose life-springs, child,
 Filled thine with life and smiled,
But then wept blood for half their own withdrawn.

If death and birth be one,
And set with rise of sun,
And truth with dreams divine,
Some word might come with thee
From over the still sea
Deep hid in shade or shine,
Crossed by the crossing sails of death and birth,
Word of some sweet new thing
Fit for such lips to bring,
Some word of love, some afterthought of earth.

If love be strong as death,
By what so natural breath
As thine could this be said ?
By what so lovely way
Could love send word to say
He lives and is not dead ?
Such word alone were fit for only thee,
If his and thine have met
Where spirits rise and set,
His whom we see not, thine whom scarce we see

His there new-born, as thou
New-born among us now ;
His, here so fruitful-souled,
Now veiled and silent here,
Now dumb as thou last year,
A ghost of one year old :
If lights that change their sphere in changing meet,
Some ray might his not give
To thine who wast to live,
And make thy present with his past life sweet ?

Let dreams that laugh or weep,
All glad and sad dreams, sleep ;
 Truth more than dreams is dear.
Let thoughts that change and fly,
Sweet thoughts and swift, go by ;
 More than all thought is here.
More than all hope can forge or memory feign
 The life that in our eyes,
 Made out of love's life, lies,
And flower-like fed with love for sun and rain.

Twice royal in its root
The sweet small olive-shoot
 Here set in sacred earth ;
Twice dowered with glorious grace
From either heaven-born race
 First blended in its birth ;
Fair God or Genius of so fair an hour,
For love of either name
 Twice crowned, with love and fame,
Guard and be gracious to the fair-named flower.



Étude Réaliste

A BABY'S feet, like sea-shells pink,
Might tempt. should heaven see meet,
An angel's lips to kiss, we think,
A baby's feet.

Like rose-hued sea-flowers toward the heat
They stretch and spread and wink
Their ten soft buds that part and meet.

No flower-bells that expand and shrink
Gleam half so heavenly sweet
As shine on life's untrodden brink
A baby's feet.



ii

A baby's hands, like rosebuds furled
Whence yet no leaf expands,
Ope if you touch, though close upcurled,
A baby's hands.

Then, fast as warriors grip their brands
When battle's bolt is hurled,
They close, clenched hard like tightening bands.

No rosebuds yet by dawn impearled
Match, even in loveliest lands,
The sweetest flowers in all the world—
A baby's hands.



iii

A baby's eyes, ere speech begin,
Ere lips learn words or sighs,
Bless all things bright enough to win
A baby's eyes.

Love, while the sweet thing laughs and lies,
And sleep flows out and in,
Sees perfect in them Paradise.

Their glance might cast out pain and sin,
Their speech make dumb the wise,
By mute glad godhead felt within
A baby's eyes.



Babyhood

i

A BABY shines as bright
If winter or if May be
On eyes that keep in sight
A baby.

Though dark the skies or grey be,
It fills our eyes with light,
If midnight or midday be.

Love hails it, day and night,
The sweetest thing that may be,
Yet cannot praise aright
A baby.



ii

All heaven, in every baby born,
All absolute of earthly leaven,
Reveals itself, though man may scorn
All heaven.

Yet man might feel all sin forgiven,
All grief appeased, all pain outworn,
By this one revelation given.

Soul, now forget thy burdens borne :
Heart, be thy joys now seven times seven :
Love shows in light more bright than morn
All heaven.



iii

What likeness may define, and stray not
From truth's exactest way,
A baby's beauty ? Love can say not
What likeness may.

The Mayflower loveliest held in May
Of all that shine and stay not
Laughs not in rosier disarray.

Sleek satin, swansdown, buds that play not
As yet with winds that play,
Would fain be matched with this, and may not
What likeness may ?

Rose, round whose bed
Dawn's cloudlets close,
Earth's brightest-bred
Rose !

No song, love knows,
May praise the head
Your curtain shows.

Ere sleep has fled,
The whole child glows
One sweet live red
Rose.





Twins

APRIL, on whose wings
Ride all gracious things,
Like the star that brings
All things good to man,
Ere his light, that yet
Makes the month shine, set,
And fair May forget
Whence her birth began,

Brings, as heart would choose,
Sound of golden news,
Bright as kindling dews
When the dawn begins ;
Tidings clear as mirth,
Sweet as air and earth
Now that hail the birth,
Twice thus blest, of twins.

In the lovely land
Where with hand in hand
Lovers wedded stand
 Other joys before
Made your mixed life sweet :
Now, as Time sees meet,
Three glad blossoms greet
 Two glad blossoms more.

Fed with sun and dew,
While your joys were new,
First arose and grew
 One bright olive-shoot :
Then a fair and fine
Slip of warm-haired pine
Felt the sweet sun shine
 On its leaf and fruit.

And it wore for mark
Graven on the dark
Beauty of its bark
 That the noblest name
Worn in song of old
By the king whose bold
Hand had fast in hold
 All the flower of fame.

Then, with southern skies
Flattered in her eyes,
Which, in lovelier wise
 Yet, reflect their blue
Brightened more, being bright
Here with life's delight,
And with love's live light
 Glorified anew,

Came, as fair as came
One who bore her name
(She that broke as flame
 From the swan-shell white),
Crowned with tender hair
Only, but more fair
Than all queens that were
 Themes of oldworld fight,

Of your flowers the third
Bud, or new-fledged bird
In your hearts' nest heard
 Murmuring like a dove
Bright as those that drew
Over waves where blew
No loud wind the blue
 Heaven-hued car of love.

Not the glorious grace
Even of that one face
Potent to displace
 All the towers of Troy
Surely shone more clear
Once with childlike cheer
Than this child's face here
 Now with living joy.

After these again
Here in April's train
Breaks the bloom of twain
 Blossoms in one birth
For a crown of May
On the front of day
When he takes his way
 Over heaven and earth.

Half a heavenly thing
Given from heaven to Spring
By the sun her king,
 Half a tender toy,
Seems a child of curl
Yet too soft to twirl ;
Seems the flower-sweet girl
 By the flower-bright boy.

All the kind gods' grace,
All their love, embrace
Ever either face,
 Ever brood above them :
All soft wings of hours
Screen them as with flowers
From all beams and showers :
 All life's seasons love them.

When the dews of sleep
Falling lightliest keep
Eyes too close to peep
 Forth and laugh off rest,
Joy from face to feet
Fill them, as is meet :
Life to them be sweet
 As their mother's breast.

When those dews are dry,
And in day's bright eye
Looking full they lie
 Bright as rose and pearl,
All returns of joy
Pure of time's alloy
Bless the rose-red boy,
 Guard the rose-white girl.



The Salt of the Earth

IF childhood were not in the world,
But only men and women grown ;
No baby-locks in tendrils curled,
No baby-blossoms blown ;

Though men were stronger, women fairer,
And nearer all delights in reach,
And verse and music uttered rarer
Tones of more godlike speech ;

Though the utmost life of life's best hours
Found, as it cannot now find, words ;
Though desert sands were sweet as flowers
And flowers could sing like birds,

But children never heard them, never
They felt a child's foot leap and run :
This were a drearier star than ever
Yet looked upon the sun.

A Baby's Death

i

A LITTLE soul scarce fledged for earth
Takes wing with heaven again for goal
Even while we hailed as fresh from birth
A little soul.

Our thoughts ring sad as bells that toll,
Not knowing beyond this blind world's girth
What things are writ in heaven's full scroll.

Our fruitfulness is there but dearth,
And all things held in time's control
Seem there, perchance, ill dreams, not worth
A little soul.

ii

The little feet that never trod
Earth, never strayed in field or street,
What hand leads upward back to God
The little feet ?

A rose in June's most honied heat,
When life makes keen the kindling sod,
Was not so soft and warm and sweet.

Their pilgrimage's period
A few swift moons have seen complete
Since mother's hands first clasped and shod
The little feet.

iii

The little hands that never sought
Earth's prizes, worthless all as sands,
What gift has death, God's servant, brought
The little hands ?

We ask : but love's self silent stands,
Love, that lends eyes and wings to thought
To search where death's dim heaven expands.

Ere this, perchance, though love know nought,
Flowers fill them, grown in lovelier lands,
Where hands of guiding angels caught
The little hands.

iv

The little eyes that never knew
Light other than of dawning skies,
What new life now lights up anew
The little eyes ?

Who knows but on their sleep may rise
Such light as never heaven let through
To lighten earth from Paradise ?

No storm, we know, may change the blue
Soft heaven that haply death descries ;
No tears, like these in ours, bedew
The little eyes.

v

Was life so strange, so sad the sky,
 So strait the wide world's range,
 He would not stay to wonder why
 Was life so strange ?

Was earth's fair house a joyless grange
 Beside that house on high
 Whence Time that bore him failed to estrange ?

That here at once his soul put by
 All gifts of time and change,
 And left us heavier hearts to sigh
 " Was life so strange ? "

vi

Angel by name love called him, seeing so fair
 The sweet small frame ;
 Meet to be called, if ever man's child were,
 Angel by name.

Rose-bright and warm from heaven's own heart he
 And might not bear [came,
 The cloud that covers earth's wan face with shame.

His little light of life was all too rare
 And soft a flame ;
 Heaven yearned for him till angels hailed him there
 Angel by name.

The song that smiled upon his birthday here
 Weeps on the grave that holds him undefiled
 Whose loss makes bitterer than a soundless tear
 The song that smiled.

His name crowned once the mightiest ever styled
 Sovereign of arts, and angel : fate and fear
 Knew then their master, and were reconciled.

But we saw born beneath some tenderer sphere
 Michael, an angel and a little child,
 Whose loss bows down to weep upon his bier
 The song that smiled.

A Baby's Epitaph

APRIL, made me : winter laid me here away asleep.
Bright as Maytime was my daytime ; night is soft and
 deep :
Though the morrow bring forth sorrow, well are ye that
 weep.

**Ye that held me dear beheld me not a twelvemonth long :
All the while ye saw me smile, ye knew not whence the
 song
Came that made me smile, and laid me here, and wrought
 you wrong.**

Angels, calling from your brawling world one undefiled,
Homeward bade me, and forbade me here to rest beguiled :
Here I sleep not : pass, and weep not here upon your
child.

One of Twain

i

ONE of twain, twin-born with flowers that waken,
Now hath passed from sense of sun and rain :
Wind from off the flower-crowned branch hath shaken
One of twain.

One twin flower must pass, and one remain :
One, the word said soothly, shall be taken,
And another left : can death refrain ?

Two years since was love's light song mistaken,
Blessing then both blossoms, half in vain ?
Night outspeeding light hath overtaken
One of twain.

ii

Night and light ? O thou of heart unwary,
Love, what knowest thou here at all aright,
Lured, abused, misled as men by fairy
Night and light ?

Haply, where thine eyes behold but night,
Soft as o'er her babe the smile of Mary
Light breaks flowerwise into new-born sight.

What though night of light to thee be chary ?
What though stars of hope like flowers take flight ?
Seest thou all things here, where all see vary
Night and light ?

Three Weeks Old

THREE weeks since there was no such rose in being ;
Now may eyes made dim with deep delight
See how fair it is, laugh with love, and seeing
Praise the chance that bids us bless the sight.

Three weeks old, and a very rose of roses,
Bright and sweet as love is sweet and bright.
Heaven and earth, till a man's life wanes and closes,
Show not life or love a lovelier sight.

Three weeks past have renewed the rose-bright creature
Day by day with life, and night by night.
Love, though fain of its every faultless feature,
Finds not words to match the silent sight.



A Clasp of Hands

i

SOFT, small, and sweet'as sunniest flowers
That bask in heavenly heat
When bud by bud breaks, breathes, and cowers,
Soft, small, and sweet,

A babe's hands open as to greet
The tender touch of ours
And mock with motion faint and fleet

The minutes of the new strange hours
That earth, not heaven, must mete ;
Buds fragrant still from heaven's own bowers,
Soft, small, and sweet.

ii

A velvet vice with springs of steel
That fasten in a trice
And clench the fingers fast that feel
A velvet vice—

What man would risk the danger twice,
Nor quake from head to heel ?
Whom would not one such test suffice ?

Well may we tremble as we kneel
In sight of Paradise,
If both a babe's closed fists conceal
A velvet vice.

Two flower-soft fists of conquering clutch,
 Two creased and dimpled wrists,
 That match, if mottled overmuch,
 Two flower-soft fists—

What heart of man dare hold the lists
 Against such odds and such
 Sweet vantage as no strength resists ?*

Our strength is all a broken crutch,
 Our eyes are dim with mists,
 Our hearts are prisoners as we touch
 Two flower-soft fists.





Cradle Songs To a Tune of Blake's

i

BABY, baby bright,
Sleep can steal from sight
Little of your light :

Soft as fire in dew,
Still the life in you
Lights your slumber through.

Four white eyelids keep
Fast the seal of sleep
Deep as love is deep :

Yet, though closed it lies,
Love behind them spies
Heaven in two blue eyes.



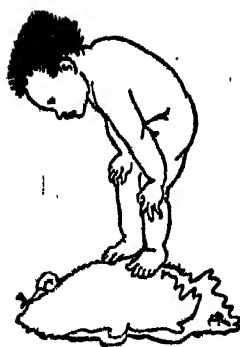
ii

Baby, baby dear,
Earth and heaven are near
Now, for heaven is here.

Heaven is every place
Where your flower-sweet face
Fills our eyes with grace.

Till your own eyes deign
Earth a glance again,
Earth and heaven are twain.

Now your sleep is done,
Shine, and show the sun
Earth and heaven are one.



iii

Baby, baby sweet,
Love's own lips are meet
Scarce to kiss your feet.

Hardly love's own ear,
When your laugh crows clear,
Quite deserves to hear.

Hardly love's own wile,
Though it please awhile,
Quite deserves your smile.

Baby full of grace,
Bless us yet a space :
Sleep will come apace.



iv

Baby, baby true,
Man, whate'er he do,
May deceive not you.

Smiles whose love is guile,
Worn a flattering while,
Win from you no smile.

One, the smile alone
Out of love's heart grown,
Ever wins your own.

Man, a dunce uncouth,
Errs in age and youth :
Babies know the truth.



V

Baby, baby fair,
Love is fain to dare
Bless your haughtiest air.

Baby blithe and bland,
Reach but forth a hand
None may dare withstand ;

Love, though wellnigh cowed,
Yet would praise aloud
Pride so sweetly proud.

No ! the fitting word
Even from breeze or bird
Never yet was heard.



VI

Baby, baby kind,
Though no word we find,
Bear us yet in mind.

Half a little hour,
Baby bright in bower,
Keep this thought aflower-

Love it is, I see,
Here with heart and knee
Bows and worships me.

What can baby do,
Then, for love so true?—
Let it worship you.



vii

Baby, baby wise,
Love's divine surmise
Lights your constant eyes.

Day and night and day
One mute word would they,
As the soul saith, say.

Trouble comes and goes ;
Wonder ebbs and flows ;
Love remains and glows.

As the fledgeling dove
Feels the breast above,
So your heart feels love.



In a Garden

BABY, see the flowers !
—Baby sees
Fairer things than these,
Fairer though they be than dreams of ours.

Baby, hear the birds !
—Baby knows
Better songs than those,
Sweeter though they sound than sweetest words.

Baby, see the moon !
—Baby's eyes
Laugh to watch it rise,
Answering light with love and night with noon.

Baby, hear the sea !
—Baby's face
Takes a graver grace,
Touched with wonder what the sound may be.

Baby, see the star !
—Baby's hand
Opens, warm and bland,
Calm in claim of all things fair that are.

Baby, hear the bells !
—Baby's head
Bows, as ripe for bed,
Now the flowers curl round and close their cells.

Baby, flower of light,
Sleep, and see
Brighter dreams than we,
Till good day shall smile away good night.





A Rhyme

BABE, if rhyme be none
For that sweet small word
Babe, the sweetest one
Ever heard,

Right it is and meet
Rhyme should keep not true
Time with such a sweet
Thing as you.

Meet it is that rhyme
Should not gain such grace :
What is April's prime
To your face ?

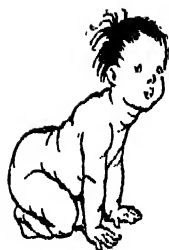
What to yours is May's
Rosiest smile ? what sound
Like your laughter sways
All hearts round ?

None can tell in metre
Fit for ears on earth
What sweet star grew sweeter
At your birth.

Wisdom doubts what may be :
Hope, with smile sublime,
Trusts : but neither, baby,
Knows the rhyme.

Wisdom lies down lonely :
Hope keeps watch from far ;
None but one seer only
Sees the star.

Love alone, with yearning
Heart for astrolabe,
Takes the star's height, burning
O'er the babe.



Baby-Bird

BABY-BIRD, baby-bird,
Ne'er a song on earth
May be heard, may be heard.
Rich as yours in mirth.

All your flickering fingers,
All your twinkling toes,
Play like light that lingers
Till the clear song close.

Baby-bird, baby-bird,
Your grave majestic eyes
Like a bird's warbled words
Speak, and sorrow dies.

Sorrow dies for love's sake,
Love grows one with mirth,
Even for one white dove's sake,
Born a babe on earth.

Baby-bird, baby-bird,
Chirping loud and long,
Other birds hush their words,
Harkening toward your song.

Sweet as spring though it ring,
Full of love's own lures,
Weak and wrong sounds their song,
Singing after yours.

Baby-bird, baby-bird,
The happy heart that hears
Seems to win back within
Heaven, and cast out fears.

Earth and sun seem as one
Sweet light and one sweet word
Known of none here but one,
Known of one sweet bird.



First Footsteps

A LITTLE way, more soft and sweet
Than fields aflower with May,
A babe's feet, venturing, scarce complete
A little way.

Eyes full of dawning day
Look up for mother's eyes to meet,
Too blithe for song to say.

Glad as the golden spring to greet
Its first live leaflet's play,
Love, laughing, leads the little feet
A little way.



Love, laughing, leads the little feet a little way



Child's Song

WHAT is gold worth, say,
Worth for work or play,
Worth to keep or pay,
Hide or throw away,
 Hope about or fear ?
What is love worth, pray ?
 Worth a tear ?

Golden on the mould
Lie the dead leaves rolled
Of the wet woods old,
Yellow leaves and cold,
 Woods without a dove .
Gold is worth but gold ;
 Love's worth love.





Six Years Old

To H. W. M.

BETWEEN the springs of six and seven,
Two fresh years' fountains, clear
Of all but golden sand for leaven,
Child, midway passing here,
As earth for love's sake dares bless heaven,
So dare I bless you, dear.

Between two bright well-heads, that brighten
With every breath that blows
Too loud to lull, too low to frighten,
But fain to rock, the rose,
Your feet stand fast, your lit smiles lighten,
That might rear flowers from snows.

You came when winds unleashed were snarling
Behind the frost-bound hours,
A snow-bird sturdier than the starling,
A storm-bird fledged for showers,
That spring might smile to find you, darling,
First born of all the flowers.

Could love make worthy things of worthless,
My song were worth an ear :
Its note should make the days most mirthless
The merriest of the year,
And wake to birth all buds yet birthless
To keep your birthday, dear.

But where your birthday brightens heaven
No need has earth, God knows,
Of light or warmth to melt or leaven
The frost or fog that glows
With sevenfold heavenly lights of seven
Sweet springs that cleave the snows.

Could love make worthy music of you,
And match my Master's powers,
Had even my love less heart to love you,
A better song were ours ;
With all the rhymes like stars above you,
And all the words like flowers.



Comparisons

CHILD, when they say that others
Have been or are like you,
Babes fit to be your brothers,
Sweet human drops of dew,
Bright fruit of mortal mothers,
What should one say or do ?

We know the thought is treason,
We feel the dream absurd ;
A claim rebuked of reason,
That withers at a word :
For never shone the season
That bore so blithe a bird.

Some smiles may seem as merry,
Some glances gleam as wise,
From lips as like a cherry
And scarce less gracious eyes ;
Eyes browner than a berry,
Lips red as morning's rise.

But never yet rang laughter
So sweet in gladdened ears
Through wall and floor and rafter
As all this household hears
And rings response thereafter
Till cloudiest weather clears.

When those your chosen of all men,
Whose honey never cloyes,
Two lights whose smiles enthrall men,
Were called at your age boys,
Those mighty men, while small men,
Could make no merrier noise.

Our Shakespeare, surely, daffed not
More lightly pain aside
From radiant lips that quaffed not
Of forethought's tragic tide :
Our Dickens, doubtless, laughed not
More loud with life's first pride.

The dawn were not more cheerless
With neither light nor dew
Than we without the fearless
Clear laugh that thrills us through :
If ever child stood peerless,
Love knows that child is you.





What is
Death ?



LOOKING on a page where stood
Graven of old on old-world wood
Death, and by the grave's edge grim,
Pale, the young man facing him,
Asked my well-beloved of me
Once what strange thing this might be,
Gaunt and great of limb.

Death, I told him : and, surprise
Deepening more his wildwood eyes
(Like some sweet fleet thing's whose breath
Speaks all spring though nought it saith),
Up he turned his rosebright face
Glorious with its seven years' grace,
Asking—What is death ?



A Child's Pity

NO sweeter thing than children's ways and wiles,
Surely, we say, can gladden eyes and ears :
Yet sometime sweeter than their words or smiles
Are even their tears.

To one for once a piteous tale was read,
How, when the murderous mother crocodile
Was slain, her fierce brood famished, and lay dead,
Starved, by the Nile.

In vast green reed-beds on the vast grey slime
Those monsters motherless and helpless lay,
Perishing only for the parent's crime
Whose seed were they.

Hours after, toward the dusk, our blithe small bird
Of Paradise, who has our hearts in keeping,
Was heard or seen, but hardly seen or heard,
For pity weeping.

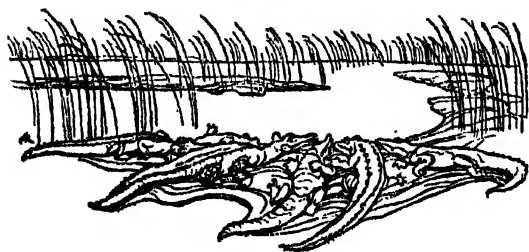
He was so sorry, sitting still apart,
For the poor little crocodiles, he said.
Six years had given him, for an angel's heart,
A child's instead.

Feigned tears the false beasts shed for murderous ends,
We know from travellers' tales of crocodiles :
But these tears wept upon them of my friend's *
Outshine his smiles.

What heavenliest angels of what heavenly city
Could match the heavenly heart in children here ?
The heart that hallowing all things with its pity
Casts out all fear ?

So lovely, so divine, so dear their laughter
Seems to us, we know not what could be more dear :
But lovelier yet we see the sign thereafter
Of such a tear.

With sense of love half laughing and half weeping
We met your tears, our small sweet-spirited friend :
Let your love have us in its heavenly keeping
To life's last end.





A Child's Laughter

ALL the bells of heaven may ring,
All the birds of heaven may sing,
All the wells on earth may spring,
All the winds on earth may bring
All sweet sounds together ;
Sweeter far than all things heard,
Hand of harper, tone of bird,
Sound of woods at sundawn stirred,
Welling water's winsome word,
Wind in warm wan weather,

One thing yet there is, that none
Hearing ere its chime be done
Knows not well the sweetest one
Heard of man beneath the sun,
Hoped in heaven hereafter ;
Soft and strong and loud and light,
Very sound of very light
Heard from morning's rosiest height,
When the soul of all delight
Fills a child's clear laughter.

Golden bells of welcome rolled
Never forth such notes, nor told
Hours so blithe in tones so bold
As the radiant mouth of gold
Here that rings forth heaven.
If the golden-crested wren
Were a nightingale—why, then,
Something seen and heard of men
Might be half as sweet as when
Laughs a child of seven.

A Child's Thanks

HOW low soe'er men rank us,
How high soe'er we win,
The children far above us
Dwell, and they deign to love us,
With lovelier love than ours,
And smiles more sweet than flowers ;
As though the sun should thank us
For letting light come in.

With too divine complaisance,
Whose grace misleads them thus,
Being gods, in heavenly blindness
They call our worship kindness,
Our pebble-gift a gem :
They think us good to them,
Whose glance, whose breath, whose presence,
Are gifts too good for us.

The poet high and hoary
Of meres that mountains bind
Felt his great heart more often
Yearn, and its proud strength soften
From stern to tenderer mood,
At thought of gratitude
Shown than of song or story
He heard of hearts unkind.

But with what words for token
And what adoring tears
Of reverence risen to passion,
In what glad prostrate fashion
Of spirit and soul subdued,
May man show gratitude
For thanks of children spoken
That hover in his ears ?

The angels laugh, your brothers,
Child, hearing you thank me,
With eyes whence night grows sunny,
And touch of lips like honey,
And words like honey-dew :
But how shall I thank you ?
For gifts above all others
What guerdon-gift may be ?

What wealth of words caressing,
What choice of songs found best,
Would seem not as derision,
Found vain beside the vision
And glory from above
Shown in a child's heart's love ?
His part in life is blessing ;
Ours, only to be blest.



A Child's Battles

πρὸς ἀπερὸν εὐρύν.—PINDAR

PRAISE of the knights of old
 May sleep : their tale is told,
 And no man cares :
 The praise which fires our lips is
 A knight's whose fame eclipses
 All of theirs.

The ruddiest light in heaven
 Blazed as his birth-star seven
 Long years ago :
 All glory crown that old year
 Which brought our stout small soldier
 With the snow !

Each baby born has one
 Star, for his friends a sun,
 The first of stars :
 And we, the more we scan it,
 The more grow sure your planet,
 Child, was Mars.

For each one flower, perchance
Blooms as his cognizance :

 The snowdrop chill,
The violet un beholden,
For some : for you the golden
 Daffodil.

Erect, a fighting flower,
It breasts the breeziest hour
 That ever blew,
And bent or broke things brittle
Or frail, unlike a little
 Knight like you.

Its flower is firm and fresh
And stout like sturdiest flesh
 Of children : all
The strenuous blast that parches
Spring hurts it not till March is
 Near his fall.

If winds that prate and fret
Remark, rebuke, regret,
 Lament, or blame
The brave plant's martial passion
It keeps its own free fashion
 All the same.

We that would fain seem wise
Assume grave mouths and eyes
 Whose looks reprove
Too much delight in battle :
But your great heart our prattle
 Cannot move.

We say, small children should
Be placid, mildly good
And blandly meek :
Whereat the broad smile rushes
Full on your lips, and flushes
All your cheek.

If all the stars that are
Laughed out, and every star
Could here be heard,
Such peals of golden laughter
We should not hear, as after
Such a word.

For all the storm saith, still,
Stout stands the daffodil :
For all we say,
Howe'er he look demurely,
Our martialist will surely
Have his way.

We may not bind with bands
Those large and liberal hands,
Nor stay from fight,
Nor hold them back from giving
No lean mean laws of living
Bind a knight.

And always here of old
Such gentle hearts and bold
Our land has bred :
How durst her eye rest else on
The glory shed from Nelson
Quick and dead ?

Shame were it, if but one
Such once were born her son,
That one to have borne,
And brought him ne'er a brother :
His praise should bring his mother
Shame and scorn.

A child high-souled as he
Whose manhood shook the sea
Smiles haply here :
His face, where love lies basking,
With bright shut mouth seems asking,
What is fear ?

The sunshine-coloured fists
Beyond his dimpling wrists
Were never closed
For saving or for sparing—
For only deeds of daring
Predisposed.

Unclenched, the gracious hands
Let slip their gifts like sands
Made rich with ore
That tongues of beggars ravish
From small stout hands so lavish
Of their store.

Sweet hardy kindly hands
Like these were his that stands
With heel on gorge
Seen trampling down the dragon
On sign or flask or flagon,
Sweet Saint George.

Some tournament, perchance,
Of hands that couch no lance,
 Might mark this spot
Your lists, if here some pleasant
Small Guenevere were present,
 Lancelot.

My brave bright flower, you need
No foolish song, nor heed
 It more than spring
The sighs of winter stricken
Dead when your haunts requicken
 Here, my king.

Yet O, how hardly may
The wheels of singing stay
 That whirl along
Bright paths whence echo raises
The phantom of your praises,
 Child, my song !

Beyond all other things
That give my words fleet wings,
 Fleet wings and strong,
You set their jesses ringing
Till hardly can I, singing,
 Stint my song.

But all things better, friend,
And worse must find an end :
 And, right or wrong,
'Tis time, lest rhyme should baffle,
I doubt, to put a snaffle
 On my song.

And never may your ear
Aught harsher hear or fear,
Nor wolfish night
Nor dog-toothed winter snarling
Behind your steps, my darling
My delight !

For all the gifts you give
Me, dear, each day you live,
Of thanks above
All thanks that could be spoken
Take not my song in token,
Take my love.



A Child's Future





A Child's Future

WHAT will it please you, my darling, hereafter to be ?
Fame upon land will you look for, or glory by sea ?
Gallant your life will be always, and all of it free.

Free as the wind when the heart of the twilight is stirred
Eastward, and sounds from the springs of the sunrise
are heard :
Free—and we know not another as infinite word.

Darkness or twilight or sunlight may compass us round,
Hate may arise up against us, or hope may confound ;
Love may forsake us ; yet may not the spirit be bound.

Free in oppression of grief as in ardour of joy
Still may the soul be, and each to her strength as a toy :
Free in the glance of the man as the smile of the boy.

Freedom alone is the salt and the spirit that gives
Life, and without her is nothing that verily lives :
Death cannot slay her : she laughs upon death and forgives.

Brightest and hardiest of roses anear and afar
Glitters the blithe little face of you, round as a star :
Liberty bless you and keep you to be as you are.

England and liberty bless you and keep you to be
Worthy the name of their child and the sight of their sea :
Fear not at all ; for a slave, if he fears not, is free.



Seven Years Old

i

SEVEN white roses on one tree,
Seven white loaves of blameless leaven,
Seven white sails on one soft sea,
Seven white swans on one lake's lee,
Seven white flowerlike stars in heaven,
All are types unmeet to be
For a birthday's crown of seven.

ii

Not the radiance of the roses,
Not the blessing of the bread,
Not the breeze that ere day grows is
Fresh for sails and swans, and closes
Wings above the sun's grave spread,
When the starshine on the snows is
Sweet as sleep on sorrow shed,

Nothing sweetest, nothing best,
 Holds so good and sweet a treasure
 As the love wherewith once blest
 Joy grows holy, grief takes rest,
 Life, half tired with hours to measure,
 Fills his eyes and lips and breast
 With most light and breath of pleasure ;*

iv

As the rapture unpolluted,
 As the passion undefiled,
 By whose force all pains heart-rooted
 Are transfigured and transmuted,
 Recompensed and reconciled,
 Through the imperial, undisputed,
 Present godhead of a child.

v

Brown bright eyes and fair bright head
 Worth a worthier crown than this is
 Worth a worthier song instead,
 Sweet grave wise round mouth, full fed
 With the joy of love, whose bliss is
 More than mortal wine and bread,
 Lips whose words are sweet as kisses,

vi

Little hands so glad of giving,
 Little heart so glad of love,
 Little soul so glad of living,
 While the strong swift hours are weaving
 Light with darkness woven above,
 Time for mirth and time for grieving,
 Plume of raven and plume of dove,

vii

I can give you but a word
 Warm with love therein for leaven,
 But a song that falls unheard
 Yet on ears of sense unstirred
 Yet by song so far from heaven,
 Whence you came the brightest bird,
 Seven years since, of seven times seven.

Eight Years Old

SUN, whom the faltering snow-cloud fears,
Rise, let the time of year be May,
Speak now the word that April hears,
Let March have all his royal way ;
Bid all spring raise in winter's ears *
All tunes her children hear or play,
Because the crown of eight glad years
On one bright head is set to-day.

ii

*

What matters cloud or sun to-day
To him who wears the wreath of years
So many, and all like flowers at play
With wind and sunshine, while his ears
Hear only song on every way ?
More sweet than spring triumphant hears
Ring through the revel-rout of May
Are these, the notes that winter fears.

iii

Strong-hearted winter knows and fears
The music made of love at play,
Or haply loves the tune he hears
From hearts fulfilled with flowering May,

Whose molten music thaws his ears
Late frozen, deaf but yesterday
To sounds of dying and dawning years,
Now quickened on his deathward way.

iv

For deathward now lies winter's way
Down the green vestibule of years
That each year brightens day by day
With flower and shower till hope scarce fears
And fear grows wholly hope of May.
But we—the music in our ears
Made of love's pulses as they play
The heart alone that makes it hears.

v

The heart it is that plays and hears
High salutation of to-day.
Tongue falters, hand shrinks back, song fears
Its own unworthiness to play
Fit music for those eight sweet years,
Or sing their blithe accomplished way.
No song quite worth a young child's ears
Broke ever even from birds in May.

vi

There beats not in the heart of May,
When summer hopes and springtide fears,
There falls not from the height of day,
When sunlight speaks and silence hears,

So sweet a psalm as children play
And sing, each hour of all their years,
Each moment of their lovely way,
And know not how it thrills our ears.

vii

Ah child, what are we, that our ears
Should hear you singing on your way,
Should have this happiness? The years
Whose hurrying wings about us play
Are not like yours, whose flower-time fears
Nought worse than sunlit showers in May,
Being sinless as the spring, that hears
Her own heart praise her every day.

viii

Yet we too triumph in the day
That bare, to entrance our eyes and ears,
To lighten daylight, and to play
Such notes as darkness knows and fears,
The child whose face illumines our way,
Whose voice lifts up the heart that hears,
Whose hand is as the hand of May
To bring us flowers from eight full years.





Olive

i

WHO may praise her ?

Eyes where midnight shames the sun,
Hair of night and sunshine spun,
Woven of dawn's or twilight's loom,
Radiant darkness, lustrous gloom,
Godlike childhood's flowerlike bloom,
None may praise aright, nor sing
Half the grace wherewith like spring
Love arrays her.

ii

Love untold
Sings in silence, speaks in light
Shed from each fair feature, bright
Still from heaven, whence toward us, now
Nine years since, she deigned to bow
Down the brightness of her brow,
Deigned to pass through mortal birth ;
Reverence calls her, here on earth,
Nine years old.

iii

Love's deep duty,
Even when love transfigured grows
Worship, all too surely knows
How, though love may cast out fear,
Yet the debt divine and dear
Due to childhood's godhead here
May by love of man be paid
Never ; never song be made
Worth its beauty.

iv

Nought is all
Sung or said or dreamed or thought
Ever, set beside it ; nought
All the love that man may give—
Love whose prayer should be, " Forgive ! "
Heaven, we see, on earth may live ;
Earth can thank not heaven, we know,
Save with songs that ebb and flow,
Rise and fall.

4

No man living,
No man dead, save haply one
Now gone homeward past the sun,
Ever found such grace as might
Tune his tongue to praise aright
Children, flowers of love and light,
Whom our praise dispraises : we
Sing, in sooth, but not as he
Sang thanksgiving.

VI

Hope that smiled,
Seeing her new-born beauty, made
Out of heaven's own light and shade.
Smiled not half so sweetly : love,
Seeing the sun, afar above,
Warm the nest that rears the dove,
Sees, more bright than moon or sun,
All the heaven of heavens in one
Little child.

vii

Who may sing her ?
Wings of angels when they stir
Make no music worthy her :
Sweeter sound her shy soft words
Here than songs of God's own birds
Whom the fire of rapture girds
Round with light from love's face lit :
Hands of angels find no fit
Gifts to bring her.

Babes at birth

Wear as raiment round them cast,
 Keep as witness toward their past,
 Tokens left of heaven ; and each,
 Ere its lips learn mortal speech,
 Ere sweet heaven pass on pass reach,
 Bears in undiverted eyes
 Proof of unforgotten skies
 Here on earth.

ix

Quenched as embers

Quenched with flakes of rain or snow
 Till the last faint flame burns low,
 All those lustrous memories lie
 Dead with babyhood gone by :
 Yet in her they dare not die :
 Others, fair as heaven is, yet,
 Now they share not heaven, forget :
 She remembers.





Nine Years Old

i

LORD of light, whose shrine no hands destroy,
God of song, whose hymn no tongue refuses,
Now, though spring far hence be cold and coy,
Bid the golden mouths of all the Muses
Ring forth gold of strains without alloy,
Till the ninefold rapture that suffuses
Heaven with song bid earth exult for joy,
Since the child whose head this dawn bedews is
Sweet as once thy violet-cradled boy.

ii

Even as he lay lapped about with flowers,
 Lies the life now nine years old before us
 Lapped about with love in all its hours ;
 Hailed of many loves that chant in chorus
 Loud or low from lush or leafless bowers,
 Some from hearts exultant born sonorous,
 Some scarce louder-voiced than soft-tongued showers
 Two months hence, when spring's light wings poised
 High shall hover, and her heart be ours. [o'er us

iii

Even as he, though man-forsaken, smiled
 On the soft kind snakes divinely bidden
 There to feed him in the green mid wild
 Full with hurtless honey, till the hidden
 Birth should prosper, finding fate more mild,
 So full-fed with pleasures unforbidden,
 So by love's lures blamelessly beguiled,
 Laughs the nursling of our hearts unhidden
 Yet by change that mars not yet the child.

iv

Ah, not yet ! Thou, lord of night and day,
 Time, sweet father of such blameless pleasure,
 Time, false friend who tak'st thy gifts away,
 Spare us yet some scantlings of the treasure,
 Leave us yet some rapture of delay,
 Yet some bliss of blind and fearless leisure
 Unprophetic of delight's decay,
 Yet some nights and days wherein to measure
 All the joys that bless us while they may.

v

Not the waste Arcadian woodland, wet
 Still with dawn and vocal with Alpheus,
 Reared a nursling worthier love's regret,
 Lord, than this, whose eyes beholden free us
 Straight from bonds the soul would fain forget,
 Fain cast off, that night and day might see us
 Clear once more of life's vain fume and fret :
 Leave us, then, whate'er thy doom decree us,
 Yet some days wherein to love him yet.

vi

Yet some days wherein the child is ours,
 Ours, not thine, O lord whose hand is o'er us
 Always, as the sky with suns and showers
 Dense and radiant, soundless or sonorous ;
 Yet some days for love's sake, ere the bowers
 Fade wherein his fair first years kept chorus
 Night and day with Graces robed like hours,
 Ere this worshipped childhood wane before us,
 Change, and bring forth fruit—but no more flowers

vii

Love we may the thing that is to be,
 Love we must : but how forego this olden
 Joy, this flower of childish love, that we
 Held more dear than aught of Time is holden—
 Time, whose laugh is like as Death's to see—
 Time, who heeds not aught of all beholden,
 Heard, or touched in passing—flower or tree,
 Tares or grain of leaden days or golden—
 More than wind has heed of ships at sea ?

viii

First the babe, a very rose of joy,
Sweet as hope's first note of jubilation,
Passes : then must growth and change destroy
Next the child, and mar the consecration
Hallowing yet, ere thought or sense annoy,
Childhood's yet half heavenlike habitation,
Bright as truth and frailer than a toy ;
Whence its guest with eager gratulation
Springs, and life grows larger round the boy.

ix

Yet, ere sunrise wholly cease to shine,
Ere change come to chide our hearts, and scatter
Memories marked for love's sake with a sign,
Let the light of dawn beholden flatter
Yet some while our eyes that feed on thine,
Child, with love that change nor time can shatter,
Love, whose silent song says more than mine
Now, though charged with elder loves and latter
Here it hails a lord whose years are nine.

After a Reading

FOR the seven times seventh time love would renew the
delight without end or alloy
That it takes in the praise as it takes in the presence of
eyes that fulfil it with joy ;
But how shall it praise them and rest unrebuked by the
presence and pride of the boy ?

Praise meet for a child is unmeet for an elder whose
winters and springs are nine :
What song may have strength in its wings to expand
them, or light in its eyes to shine,
That shall seem not as weakness and darkness if matched
with the theme I would fain make mine ?

The round little flower of a face that exults in the sun-
shine of shadowless days
Defies the delight it enkindles to sing of it aught not
unfit for the praise
Of the sweetest of all things that eyes may rejoice in and
tremble with love as they gaze.

Such tricks and such meanings abound on the lips and
the brows that are brighter than light,
The demure little chin, the sedate little nose, and the
forehead of sun-stained white,
That love overflows into laughter and laughter subsides
into love at the sight.

O singers that best loved children; and best for their
sakes are beloved of us here,
In the world of your life everlasting, where love has no
thorn and desire has no fear,
All else may be sweeter than aught is on earth, nought
dearer than these are dear.



Maytime in Midwinter

A NEW year gleams on us, tearful
And troubled and smiling dim
As the smile on a lip still fearful,
As glances of eyes that swim :
But the bird of my heart makes cheerful
The days that are bright for him.

Child, how may a man's love merit
The grace you shed as you stand,
The gift that is yours to inherit ?
Through you are the bleak days bland ;
Your voice is a light to my spirit ;
You bring the sun in your hand.

The year's wing shows not a feather
As yet of the plumes to be ;
Yet here in the shrill grey weather
The spring's self stands at my knee,
And laughs as we commune together,
And lightens the world we see.

The rains are as dews for the christening
Of dawns that the nights benumb :
The spring's voice answers me listening
For speech of a child to come,
While promise of music is glistening
On lips that delight keeps dumb.

The mists and the storms receding
At sight of you smile and die :
Your eyes held wide on me reading
Shed summer across the sky :
Your heart shines clear for me, heeding
No more of the world than I.

The world, what is it to you, dear,
And me, if its face be grey,
And the new-born year be a shrewd year
For flowers that the fierce winds fray ?
You smile, and the sky seems blue, dear ;
You laugh, and the month turns May.

Love cares not for care, he has daffed her
Aside as a mate for guile :
The sight that my soul yearns after
Feeds full my sense for awhile ;
Your sweet little sun-faced laughter,
Your good little glad grave smile.

Your hands through the bookshelves flutter ;
Scott, Shakespeare, Dickens, are caught ;
Blake's visions, that lighten and mutter ;
Molière—and his smile has nought
Left on it of sorrow, to utter
The secret things of his thought.

No grim thing written or graven
But grows, if you gaze on it, bright ;
A lark's note rings from the raven,
And tragedy's robe turns white ;
And shipwrecks drift into haven ;
And darkness laughs, and is light.

Grief seems but a vision of madness ;
Life's key-note peals from above
With nought in it more of sadness
Than broods on the heart of a dove :
At sight of you, thought grows gladness,
And life, through love of you, love.



Not a Child

i

" NOT a child : I call myself a boy,"
Says my king, with accent stern yet mild,
Now nine years have brought him change of joy ;
 " Not a child."

How could reason be so far beguiled,
Err so far from sense's safe employ,
Stray so wide of truth, or run so wild ?

Seeing his face bent over book or toy,
Child I called him, smiling : but he smiled
Back, as one too high for vain annoy—
 Not a child.

Not a child ? alack the year !
 What should ail an undefiled
 Heart, that he would fain appear
 Not a child ?

Men, with years and memories piled
 Each on other, far and near,
 Fain again would so be styled :

Fain would cast off hope and fear,
 Rest, forget, be reconciled :
 Why would you so fain be, dear,
 Not a child ?

Child or boy, my darling, which you will,
 Still your praise finds heart and song employ,
 Heart and song both yearning toward you still,
 Child or boy.

All joys else might sooner pall or cloy
 Love than this which inly takes its fill,
 Dear, of sight of your more perfect joy.

Nay, be aught you please, let all fulfil
 All your pleasure ; be your world your toy :
 Mild or wild we love you, loud or still,
 Child or boy.

A flower of bliss, beyond all blessing Blest

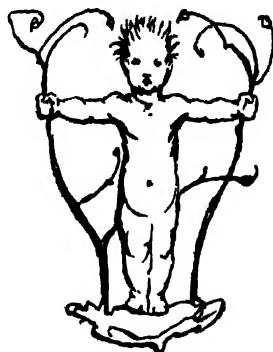


Benediction

BLEST in death and life beyond man's guessing,
Little children live and die, possess
Still of grace that keeps them past expressing
Blest.

Each least chirp that rings from every nest,
Each least touch of flower-soft fingers pressing
Aught that yearns and trembles to be prest,

Each least glance, gives gift of grace, redressing
Grief's worst wrongs : each mother's nurturing breast
Feeds a flower of bliss, beyond all blessing
Blest.



A Dark Month

'La maison sans enfants !'—VICTOR HUGO

A MONTH without sight of the sun
Rising or reigning or setting
Through days without use of the day,
Who calls it the month of May ?
The sense of the name is undone
And the sound of it fit for forgetting.

We shall not feel if the sun rise,
We shall not care when it sets :
If a nightingale make night's air
As noontide, why should we care ?
Till a light of delight that is done rise,
Extinguishing grey regrets ;

Till a child's face lighten again
On the twilight of older faces ;
Till a child's voice fall as the dew
On furrows with heat parched through
And all but hopeless of grain,
Refreshing the desolate places—

Fall clear on the ears of us hearkening
And hungering for food of the sound
And thirsting for joy of his voice :
Till the hearts in us hear and rejoice,
And the thoughts of them doubting and darkening
Rejoice with a glad thing found.

When the heart of our gladness is gone,
What comfort is left with us after ?
When the light of our eyes is away,
What glory remains upon May,
What blessing of song is thereon
If we drink not the light of his laughter ?

No small sweet face with the daytime
To welcome, warmer than noon !
No sweet small voice as a bird's
To bring us the day's first words !
Mid May for us here is not Maytime :
No summer begins with June.

A whole dead month in the dark,
A dawn in the mists that o'ercome her
Stified and smothered and sad—
Swift speed to it, barren and bad !
And return to us, voice of the lark,
And remain with us, sunlight of summer.

Alas, what right has the dawn to glimmer,
 What right has the wind to do aught but moan ?
 All the day should be dimmer
 Because we are left alone.

Yestermorn like a sunbeam present
 Hither and thither a light step smiled,
 And made each place for us pleasant
 With the sense or the sight of a child.

But the leaves persist as before, and after
 Our parting the dull day still bears flowers .
 And songs less bright than his laughter
 Deride us from birds in the bowers.

Birds, and blossoms, and sunlight only,
 As though such folly sufficed for spring !
 As though the house were not lonely
 For want of the child its king !

iii

Asleep and afar to-night my darling
Lies, and heeds not the night,
If winds be stirring or storms be snarling ;
For his sleep is its own sweet light.

I sit where he sat beside me quaffing
The wine of story and song
Poured forth of immortal cups, and laughing
When mirth in the draught grew strong.

I broke the gold of the words, to melt it
For hands but seven years old,
And they caught the tale as a bird, and felt it
More bright than visible gold.

And he drank down deep, with his eyes broad beaming,
Here in this room where I am,
The golden vintage of Shakespeare, gleaming
In the silver vessels of Lamb.

Here by my hearth where he was I listen
For the shade of the sound of a word,
Athirst for the birdlike eyes to glisten,
For the tongue to chirp like a bird.

At the blast of battle, how broad they brightened,
Like fire in the spheres of stars,
And clung to the pictured page, and lightened
As keen as the heart of Mars !

At the touch of laughter, how swift it twittered
The shrillest music on earth ;
How the lithe limbs laughed and the whole child glittered
With radiant riot of mirth !

Our Shakespeare now, as a man dumb-stricken,
Stands silent there on the shelf :
And my thoughts, that had song in the heart of them,
And relish not Shakespeare's self. [sicken,

And my mood grows moodier than Hamlet's even,
And man delights not me,
But only the face that morn and even
My heart leapt only to see.

That my heart made merry within me seeing,
And sang as his laugh kept time :
But song finds now no pleasure in being,
And love no reason in rhyme.

iv

Mild May-blossom and proud sweet bay-flower,
What, for shame, would you have with us here ?
It is not the month of the May-flower
This, but the fall of the year.

Flowers open only their lips in derision,
Leaves are as fingers that point in scorn :
The shows we see are a vision ;
Spring is not verily born.

Yet boughs turn supple and buds grow sappy,
As though the sun were indeed the sun :
And all our woods are happy
With all their birds save one.

But spring is over, but summer is over,
But autumn is over, and winter stands
With his feet sunk deep in the clover
And cowslips cold in his hands.

His hoar grim head has a hawthorn bonnet,
His gnarled gaunt hand has a gay green staff
With new-blown rose-blossom on it :
But his laugh is a dead man's laugh.

The laugh of spring that the heart seeks after,
The hand that the whole world yearns to kiss,
It rings not here in his laughter,
The sign of it is not this.

There is not strength in it left to splinter
Tall oaks, nor frost in his breath to sting :
Yet it is but a breath as of winter,
And it is not the hand of spring.



V

Thirty-one pale maidens, clad
 All in mourning dresses,
 Pass, with lips and eyes more sad
 That it seems they should be glad,
 Heads discrowned of crowns they had
 Grey for golden tresses.

Grey their girdles too for green,
 And their veils dishevelled :
 None would say, to see their mien,
 That the least of these had been
 Born no baser than a queen,
 Reared where flower-fays revelled.

Dreams that strive to seem awake,
 Ghosts that walk by daytime,
 Weary winds the way they take,
 Since, for one child's absent sake,
 May knows well, whate'er things make
 Sport, it is not Maytime.

vi

A hand at the door taps light
As the hand of my heart's delight :
It is but a full-grown hand,
Yet the stroke of it seems to start
Hope like a bird in my heart,
Too feeble to soar or to stand.

To start light hope from her cover
Is to raise but a kite for a plover
If her wings be not fledged to soar.
Desire, but in dreams, cannot ope
The door that was shut upon hope
When love went out at the door.

Well were it if vision could keep
The lids of desire as in sleep
Fast locked, and over his eyes
A dream with the dark soft key
In her hand might hover, and be
Their keeper till morning rise ;

The morning that brings after many
Days fled with no light upon any
The small face back which is gone ;
When the loved little hands once more
Shall struggle and strain at the door
They beat their summons upon.

viii

A twilight fire-fly may suggest
How flames the fire that feeds the sun :
“ A crooked figure may attest
In little space a million.”

But this faint-figured verse, that dresses
With flowers the bones of one bare month,
Of all it would say scarce expresses
In crooked ways a millionth.

A fire-fly tenders to the father
Of fires a tribute something worth :
My verse, a shard-borne beetle rather,
Drones over scarce-illuminated earth.

Some inches round me though it brighten
With light of music-making thought,
The dark indeed it may not lighten,
The silence moves not, hearing nought.

Only my heart is eased with hearing,
Only mine eyes are soothed with seeing,
A face brought nigh, a footfall nearing,
Till hopes take form and dreams have being.

18

As a poor man hungering stands with insatiate eyes and
 Void of bread [hands
 Right in sight of men that feast while his famine with
 Crumb is fed, [no least

Here across the garden-wall can I hear strange children
Watch them play, [call,
From the windowed seat above, whence the goodlier
Is away. [child I love

Here the sights we saw together moved his fancy like
 To and fro, [a feather
 Now to wonder, and thereafter to the sunny storm of
 Loud and low— [laughter

Sights engraven on storied pages where man's tale of
 All was told— [seven swift ages
 Seen of eyes yet bright from heaven—for the lips that
 Sweet years old. [laughed were seven

X

Why should May remember
March, if March forget
The days that began with December,
The nights that a frost could fret ?

All their griefs are done with
Now the bright months bless
Fit souls to rejoice in the sun with,
Fit heads for the wind's caress ;

Souls of children quickening
With the whole world's mirth,
Heads closelier than field-flowers thickening
That crowd and illuminate earth,

Now that May's call musters
Files of baby bands
To marshal in joyfuller clusters
Than the flowers that encumber their hands.

Yet morose November
Found them no less gay,
With nought to forget or remember
Less bright than a branch of may.

.

Now that May's call musters files of baby hands



All the seasons moving
Move their minds alike
Applauding, acclaiming, approving
All hours of the year that strike.

So my heart may fret not,
Wondering if my friend
Remember me not or forget not
Or ever the month find end.

Not that love sows lighter
Seed in children sown,
But that life being lit in them brighter
Moves fleeter than even our own.

May nor yet September
Binds their hearts, that yet
Remember, forget, and remember,
Forget, and recall, and forget.

xi

As light on a lake's face moving
Between a cloud and a cloud
Till night reclaim it, reproving
The heart that exults too loud,

The heart that watching rejoices
When soft it swims into sight
Applauded of all the voices
And stars of the windy night,

So brief and unsure, but sweeter .
Than ever a moondawn smiled,
Moves, measured of no tune's metre,
The song in the soul of a child ;

The song that the sweet soul singing
Half listens, and hardly hears,
Though sweeter than joy-bells ringing
And brighter than joy's own tears ;

The song that remembrance of pleasure
Begins, and forgetfulness ends
With a soft swift change in the measure
That rings in remembrance of friends

As the moon on the lake's face flashes,
So haply may gleam at whiles
A dream through the dear deep lashes
Whereunder a child's eye smiles,

And the least of us all that love him
May take for a moment part
With angels around and above him,
And I find place in his heart.

Child, were you kinless and lonely—
 Dear, were you kin to me—
 My love were compassionate only
 Or such as it needs would be.

But eyes of father and mother
 Like sunlight shed on you shine :
 What need you have heed of another
 Such new strange love as is mine ?

It is not meet if unruly
 Hands take of the children's bread
 And cast it to dogs ; but truly
 The dogs after all would be fed.

On crumbs from the children's table
 That crumble, dropped from above,
 My heart feeds, fed with unstable
 Loose waifs of a child's light love.

Though love in your heart were brittle
 As glass that breaks with a touch,
 You haply would lend him a little
 Who surely would give you much.

xiii

Here is a rough
Rude sketch of my friend,
Faint-coloured enough
And unworthily penned.

Fearlessly fair
And triumphant he stands,
And holds unaware
Friends' hearts in his hands ;

Stalwart and straight
As an oak that should bring
Forth gallant and great
Fresh roses in spring.

On the paths of his pleasure
All graces that wait
What metre shall measure
What rhyme shall relate

Each action, each motion,
Each feature, each limb,
Demands a devotion
In honour of him :

Head that the hand
Of a god might have blest,
Laid lustrous and bland
On the curve of its crest :

Mouth sweeter than cherries
Keen eyes as of Mars
Browner than berries
And brighter than stars.

Nor colour nor wordy
Weak song can declare
The stature how sturdy,
How stalwart his air.

As a king in his bright
Presence-chamber may be,
So seems he in height—
Twice higher than your knee.

As a warrior sedate
With reserve of his power,
So seems he in state—
As tall as a flower :

As a rose overtowering
The ranks of the rest
That beneath it lie cowering,
Less bright than their best

And his hands are as sunny
As ruddy ripe corn
Or the browner-hued honey
From heather-bells borne.

When summer sits proudest,
Fulfilled with its mirth,
And rapture is loudest
In air and on earth,

The suns of all hours
That have ripened the roots
Bring forth not such flowers
And beget not such fruits.

And well though I know it,
As fain would I write,
Child, never a poet
Could praise you aright.

I bless you ? the blessing
Were less than a jest
Too poor for expressing ;
I come to be blest,

With humble and dutiful
Heart, from above :
Bless me, O my beautiful
Innocent love !

This rhyme in your praise
With a smile was begun ;
But the goal of his ways
Is uncovered to none,

Nor pervious till after
The limit impend ;
It is not in laughter
These rhymes of you end.



xiv

Spring, and fall, and summer, and winter,
Which may Earth love least of them all,
Whose arms embrace as their signs imprint her,
Summer, or winter, or spring, or fall ?

The clear-eyed spring with the wood-birds mating,
The rose-red summer with eyes aglow,
The yellow fall with serene eyes waiting,
The wild-eyed winter with hair all snow ?

Spring's eyes are soft, but if frosts benumb her
As winter's own will her shrewd breath sting :
Storms may rend the raiment of summer,
And fall grow bitter as harsh-lipped spring.

One sign for summer and winter guides me,
One for spring, and the like for fall :
Whichever from sight of my friend divides me,
That is the worst ill season of all.

XV

Worse than winter is spring
If I come not to sight of my king :
But then what a spring will it be
When my king takes homage of me !

I send his grace from afar
Homage, as though to a star ;
As a shepherd whose flock takes flight
May worship a star by night.

As a flock that a wolf is upon
My songs take flight and are gone :
No heart is in any to sing
Aught but the praise of my king.

Fain would I once and again
Sing deeds and passions of men :
But ever a child's head gleams
Between my work and my dreams.

Between my hand and my eyes
The lines of a small face rise,
And the lines I trace and retrace
Are none but those of the face.

xvi

Till the tale of all this flock of days alike
 All be done,
Weary days of waiting till the month's hand strike,
 Thirty-one,
Till the clock's hand of the month break off, and end
 With the clock,
Till the last and whitest sheep at last be penned
 Of the flock,
I their shepherd keep the count of night and day
 With my song,
Though my song be, like this month which once was May,
 All too long.

xvii

The incarnate sun, a tall strong youth,
On old Greek eyes in sculpture smiled :
But trulier had it given the truth
To shape him like a child.

No face full-grown of all our dearest
So lightens all our darkness, none
Most loved of all our hearts hold nearest
So far outshines the sun,

As when with sly shy smiles that feign
Doubt if the hour be clear, the time
Fit to break off my work again
Or sport of prose or rhyme,

My friend peers in on me with merry
Wise face, and though the sky stay dim
The very light of day, the very
Sun's self comes in with him.

xviii

Out of sight,
Out of mind !
Could the light
Prove unkind ?

Can the sun
Quite forget
What was done
Ere he set ?

Does the moon
When she wanes
Leave no tune
That remains

In the void
Shell of night
Overcloyed
With her light ?

Must the shore
At low tide
Feel no more
Hope or pride,

No intense
Joy to be,
In the sense
Of the sea—

In the pulses
Of her shocks
It repulses,
When its rocks

Thrill and ring
As with glee ?
Has my king
Cast off me,

Whom no bird
Flying south
Brings one word
From his mouth ?

Not the ghost
Of a word
Riding post
Have I heard,

Since the day
When my king
Took away
With him spring,

And the cup
Of each flower
Shrivelled up
That same hour,

With no light
Left behind.
Out of sight,
Out of mind !

xix

Because I adore you
And fall
On the knees of my spirit before you—
After all,

You need not insult,
My king,
With neglect, though your spirit exult
In the spring,

Even me, though not worth,
God knows,
One word of you sent me in mirth,
Or one rose

Out of all in your garden
That grow
Where the frost and the wind never harden
Flakes of snow,

Nor ever is rain
At all,
But the roses rejoice to remain
Fair and tall—

The roses of love,
More sweet
Than blossoms that rain from above
Round our feet,

When under high bowers
We pass,
Where the west wind freckles with flowers
All the grass.

But a child's thoughts bear
More bright
Sweet visions by day, and more fair
Dreams by night,

Than summer's whole treasure
Can be :
What am I that his thought should take pleasure,
Then, in me ?

I am only my love's
True lover,
With a nestful of songs, like doves
Under cover,

That I bring in my cap
Fresh caught,
To be laid on my small king's lap—
Worth just nought.

Yet it haply may hap
That he,
When the mirth in his veins is as sap
In a tree,

Will remember me too
Some day
Ere the transit be thoroughly through
Of this May—

Or perchance, if such grace
May be,
Some night when I dream of his face,
Dream of me.

Or if this be too high
A hope
For me to prefigure in my
Horoscope,

He may dream of the place
Where we
Basked once in the light of his face,
Who now see

Nought brighter, not one
Thing bright,
Than the stars and the moon and the sun,
Day nor night.

xx

Day by darkling day,
Overpassing, bears away
Somewhat of the burden of this weary May.

Night by numbered night,
Waning, brings more near in sight
Hope that grows to vision of my heart's delight.

Nearer seems to burn
In the dawn's rekindling urn
Flame of fragrant incense, hailing his return.

Louder seems each bird
In the brightening branches heard
Still to speak some ever more delightful word.

All the mists that swim
Round the dawns that grow less dim
Still wax brighter and more bright with hope of him.

All the suns that rise
Bring that day more near our eyes
When the sight of him shall clear our clouded skies.

All the winds that roam
Fruitful fields or fruitless foam
Blow the bright hour near that brings his bright face home.

xxi

I hear of two far hence
In a garden met,
And the fragrance blown from thence
Fades not yet.

The one is seven years old,
And my friend is he :
But the years of the other have told
Eighty-three.

To hear these twain converse
Or to see them greet
Were sweeter than softest verse
May be sweet.

The hoar old gardener there
With an eye more mild
Perchance than his mild white hair
Meets the child.

I had rather hear the words
That the twain exchange
Than the songs of all the birds
There that range,

Call, chirp, and twitter there
Through the garden-beds
Where the sun alike sees fair
Those two heads,

And which may holier be
Held in heaven of those
Or more worth heart's thanks to see
No man knows.

xxii

Of such is the kingdom of heaven.
No glory that ever was shed
From the crowning star of the seven
That crown the north world's head,

No word that ever was spoken
Of human or godlike tongue,
Gave ever such godlike token
Since human harps were strung.

No sign that ever was given
To faithful or faithless eyes
Showed ever beyond clouds riven
So clear a Paradise.

Earth's creeds may be seventy times seven
And blood have defiled each creed :
If of such be the kingdom of heaven,
It must be heaven indeed.



xxiii

The wind on the downs is bright
As though from the sea :
And morning and night
Take comfort again with me.

He is nearer to-day,
Each night to each morning saith,
Whose return shall revive dead May
With the balm of his breath.

The sunset says to the moon,
He is nearer to-night
Whose coming in June
Is looked for more than the light.

Bird answers to bird,
Hour passes the sign on to hour,
And for joy of the bright news heard
Flower murmurs to flower.

The ways that were glad of his feet
In the woods that he knew
Grow softer to meet
The sense of his footfall anew.

He is near now as day,
Says hope to the new-born light :
He is near now as June is to May,
Says love to the night.

xxiv

Good things I keep to console me
For lack of the best of all,
A child to command and control me,
Bid come and remain at his call.

Sun, wind, and woodland and highland,
Give all that ever they gave :
But my world is a cultureless island,
My spirit a masterless slave.

And friends are about me, and better
At summons of no man stand :
But I pine for the touch of a fetter,
The curb of a strong king's hand.

Each hour of the day in her season
Is mine to be served as I will :
And for no more exquisite reason
Are all served idly and ill.

By slavery my sense is corrupted,
My soul not fit to be free :
I would fain be controlled, interrupted,
Compelled as a thrall may be.

For fault of spur and of bridle
I tire of my stall to death :
My sail flaps joyless and idle
For want of a small child's breath.

XXV

Whiter and whiter
The dark lines grow,
And broader opens and brighter
The sense of the text below.

Nightfall and morrow
Bring nigher the boy
Whom wanting we want not sorrow,
Whom having we want no joy.

Clearer and clearer
The sweet sense grows
Of the word which hath summer for hearer,
The word on the lips of the rose.

Duskily dwindles
Each deathlike day,
Till June rearing rekindles
The depth of the darkness of May.

The Path of Spring



xxvi

*"In his bright radiance and collateral light
Must I be comforted, not in his sphere."*

Stars in heaven are many,
Suns in heaven but one :
Nor for man may any
Star supplant the sun.

Many a child as joyous
As our far-off king
Meets as though to annoy us
In the paths of spring.

Sure as spring gives warning,
All things dance in tune :
Sun on Easter morning,
Cloud and windy moon,

Stars between the tossing
Boughs of tuneful trees,
Sails of ships recrossing
Leagues of dancing seas ;

Best, in all this playtime,
Best of all in tune,
Girls more glad than Maytime,
Boys more bright than June ;

Mixed with all those dances,
Far through field and street
Sing their silent glances,
Ring their radiant feet.

Flowers wherewith May crowned us
Fall ere June be crowned :
Children blossom round us
All the whole year round.

Is the garland worthless
For one rose the less,
And the feast made mirthless ?
Love, at least, says yes.

Strange it were, with many
Stars enkindling air,
Should but one find any
Welcome : strange it were,

Had one star alone won
Praise for light from far :
Nay, love needs his own one
Bright particular star.

Hope and recollection
Only lead him right
In its bright reflection
And collateral light.

Find as yet we may not
Comfort in its sphere :
Yet these days will weigh not
When it warms us here ;

When full-orbed it rises,
Now divined afar :
None in all the skies is
Half so good a star ;

None that seers importune
Till a sign be won :
Star of our good fortune,
Rise and reign, our sun !

xxvii

I pass by the small room now forlorn
Where once each night as I passed I knew
A child's bright sleep from even to morn
Made sweet the whole night through.

As a soundless shell, as a songless nest,
Seems now the room that was radiant then
And fragrant with his happier rest
Than that of slumbering men.

The day therein is less than the day,
The night is indeed night now therein :
Heavier the dark seems there to weigh,
And slower the dawns begin.

As a nest fulfilled with birds, as a shell
Fulfilled with breath of a god's own hymn,
Again shall be this bare blank cell,
Made sweet again with him.

xxviii

Spring darkens before us,
A flame going down,
With chant from the chorus
Of days without crown—
Cloud, rain, and sonorous
Soft wind on the down.

She is wearier not of us
Than we of the dream
That spring was to love us
And joy was to gleam
Through the shadows above us
That shift as they stream.

Half dark and half hoary,
Float far on the loud
Mild wind, as a glory
Half pale and half proud
From the twilight of story,
Her tresses of cloud ;

Like phantoms that glimmer
Of glories of old
With ever yet dimmer
Pale circlets of gold
As darkness grows grimmer
And memory more cold.

Like hope growing clearer
With wane of the moon,
Shines toward us the nearer
Gold frontlet of June,
And a face with it dearer
Than midsummer noon.





xxix

You send me your love in a letter,
I send you my love in a song :
Ah child, your gift is the better,
Mine does you but wrong.

No fame, were the best less brittle,
No praise, were it wide as earth,
Is worth so much as a little
Child's love may be worth.

We see the children above us
As they might angels above :
Come back to us, child, if you love us,
And bring us your love.

XXX

No time for books or for letters :
What time should there be ?
No room for tasks and their fetters :
Full room to be free.

The wind and the sun and the Maytime
Had never a guest
More worthy the most that his playtime
Could give of its best.

If rain should come on, peradventure,
(But sunshine forbid !)
Vain hope in us haply might venture
To dream as it did.

But never may come, of all comers
Least welcome, the rain,
To mix with his servant the summer's
Rose-garlanded train !

He would write, but his hours are as busy
As bees in the sun,
And the jubilant whirl of their dizzy
Dance never is done.

The message is more than a letter,
Let love understand,
And the thought of his joys even better
Than sight of his hand.

Summer's rose-garlanded train



xxx

Wind, high-souled, full-hearted
 South-west wind of the spring,
 Ere April and earth had parted,
 Skies, bright with thy forward wing,
 Grew dark in an hour with the shadow behind it, that
 bade not a bird dare sing.

Wind whose feet are sunny,
 Wind whose wings are cloud,
 With lips more sweet than honey
 Still, speak thy low or loud,
 Rejoice now again in the strength of thine heart: let
 the depth of thy soul wax proud.

We hear thee singing or sighing,
 Just not power to sigh,
 All but thine being
 Between the clouds and the light,
 And the light in our hearts is enkindled, the shadow
 therein of the clouds put to flight.

From the gift of thine hands we gather
 The core of the flowers therein,
 Keen glad heart of heather,
 Hot sweet heart of whin,
 Twin breaths in thy godlike breath close blended of
 wild spring's wildest of kin.

For the house that was childless awhile, and the light
of it darkened, the pulse of it dwindled,
Rings radiant again with a child's bright feet, with the
light of his face is rekindled.
And the ways of the meadows that knew him, the sweep
of the down that the sky's belt closes,
Grow gladder at heart than the soft wind made them
whose feet were but fragrant with roses,
Though the fall of the year be upon us, who trusted
in June and by June were defrauded,
And the summer that brought us not back the desire
of our eyes be gone hence unapplauded.
For July came joyless among us, and August went out
from us arid and sterile,
And the hope of our hearts, as it seemed, was no more
than a flower that the seasons imperil,
And the joy of our hearts, as it seemed, than a thought
which regret had not heart to remember,
Till four dark months overpast were atoned for, and
summer began in September.
Hark, April again as a bird in the house with a child's
voice hither and thither :
See, May in the garden again with a child's face cheering
the woods ere they wither.
June laughs in the light of his eyes, and July on the
sunbright cheeks of him slumbers,
And August glows in a smile more sweet than the cadence
of gold-mouthed numbers.
In the morning the sight of him brightens the sun, and
the noon with delight in him flushes,
And the silence of nightfall is music about him as soft
as the sleep that it hushes.
We awake with a sense of a sunrise that is not a gift of
the sundawn's giving,
And a voice that salutes us is sweeter than all sounds
else in the world of the living.

And a presence that warms us is brighter than all in
the world of our visions beholden,
Though the dreams of our sleep were as those that the
light of a world without grief makes golden.
For the best that the best of us ever devised as a likeness
of heaven and its glory,
What was it of old, or what is it and will be for ever,
in song or in story,
Or in shape or in colour of carven or painted resemblance,
adored of all ages,
But a vision recorded of children alive in the pictures
of old or the pages ?
Where children are not, heaven is not, and heaven if
they come not again shall be never :
But the face and the voice of a child are assurance of
heaven and its promise for ever.



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